



February 19, 2025

**House Health and Government Operations Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

HB 798 - Opioid Restitution Fund - Interactive Dashboard

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 100,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

Behavioral Health System Baltimore supports HB798 - Opioid Restitution Fund - Interactive Dashboard. Public transparency is the best way to ensure the Opioid Restitution Fund (ORF) is only used for effective opioid abatement strategies.

Maryland and its local jurisdictions are poised to receive considerable resources through the opioid settlement process. These resources, currently estimated at over \$650 million, can be transformative in the state’s efforts to prevent overdose. It will be tempting, however, to use these funds to address budget shortfalls or fund favored programs rather than focusing entirely on opioid abatement. The tobacco settlement and the experience of other states in managing their opioid settlement dollars provide cautionary tales. It is estimated that only 3% of tobacco settlement funds went to programs to prevent smoking and help people quit.¹ A similar result could occur with the ORF without proper transparency.

HB798 sets out to provide transparency through a public dashboard. The dashboard would provide information on funding allocations and program descriptions broken down by jurisdiction. It would also provide information on public hearings on ORF spending and priorities. This information would provide an important safeguard to ensure funds are used appropriately. This would also not impact the state budget since ORF dollars would be used to create and maintain the dashboard. **BHSB urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to pass HB798.**

For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142

Endnotes:

¹ Berk J, Bailer D, Marshall B. How to Make Sure Opioid Settlement Money Isn’t Wasted. Stat News. October 23, 2024. Available at <https://www.statnews.com/2024/10/23/opioid-settlement-funds-states-spending-projects-evidence/>.